

The Better Chicken Commitment



An ESG commitment to
improving the lives of millions of
chickens farmed for meat

Business Guide

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Horizon Research shows **77%** of Kiwis polled wanted to see their supermarket **providing chicken meat to the Better Chicken Commitment standards.** **02**



The rising trend of higher welfare chicken

More than ever, Kiwi customers are purchasing with animal welfare in mind.

The Better Chicken Commitment has been expanding rapidly across Europe and America, where this progressive policy was first tabled in 2016. Animals Aotearoa developed the regionally-specific Australia-New Zealand Better Chicken Commitment (Aus-NZ BCC) to meet market considerations in Oceania, and improve welfare outcomes for chickens in New Zealand and over the Tasman, thereby ensuring Kiwi consumers don't miss out on better quality chicken.

The Better Chicken Commitment is an evidence-based standard developed by animal welfare scientists to address the most pressing issues to improve the lives of chickens bred for meat. The standards are designed to be a compromise, providing meaningful improvements while still achievable at a commercial production scale, as has rolled out in overseas markets. The Australia-New Zealand version of the commitment covers the same science-backed improvements, but has been updated to the local context.

Every year, approximately 120 million chickens are bred and killed for meat in New Zealand. These chickens (called "broilers" by the chicken industry) are all bred to grow unnaturally fast, from hatch to slaughter weight in six weeks or fewer. The birds suffer significantly, and needlessly, as a result.

The Better Chicken Commitment was developed in response to the concerns of animal welfare scientists observing an escalating decline in welfare outcomes for chickens as global production continued to increase. It supports retailers and the food service industry to be leaders in this positive movement.

15 leading animal welfare organisations brought the Better Chicken Commitment to Aotearoa New Zealand, including Animals Aotearoa, SPCA, World Animal Protection, Compassion in World Farming and Veterinarians for Animal Welfare Aotearoa.



New Zealanders' perceptions of farmed animal welfare

Consumers are now demanding improved animal welfare and food quality standards, with people becoming increasingly concerned about where their food comes from and how it was produced.

90% of people believe it is important to protect the welfare of farmed animals in New Zealand.¹



Progressive policy on higher welfare production methods has made national news as New Zealand raises the bar, with more of us than ever rejecting cage eggs and choosing free-range meat.

Recent independent Horizon Research surveys show most New Zealanders care about the welfare of farmed animals, including chickens, and expect food businesses to do the same.

Shoppers abdicate responsibility to the brands they shop with, trusting they are being sold more ethical options, and are then horrified to learn the reality. The current systemic suffering is out of step with consumer expectations and undermines ESG values. Better chicken breeds that are healthier, and aligned with customer expectations, are the next frontier in animal welfare.

Chicken meat sold by major food brands, including from free-range systems, is out of step with shopper expectations.

Two-thirds of people either strongly agreed or agreed that **when buying chicken meat**, it is important to them that **the chicken had a good life on a farm that treats animals well.**²

1. Horizon Research Poll, July 2023.

2. Horizon Research Poll, December 2023.

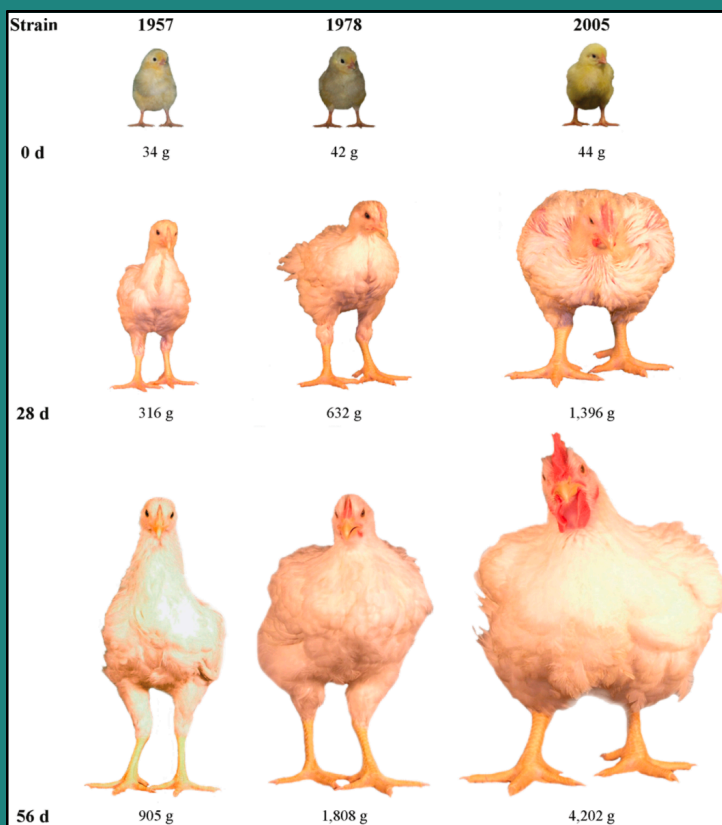
Chickens bred for meat

Currently, in New Zealand, all chickens raised commercially for meat have been selectively bred to grow abnormally fast. The modern chicken (when compared to the breeds used in the 1950s) grows to be twice as large, in half the time. The two unnatural, unhealthy breeds currently used, Cobb and Ross, grow so rapidly that many suffer chronic pain and lameness. The genetics have been selected for favourable quick muscle growth, with a particularly heavy breast.

The skeletal structures of these birds cannot keep up with the strain of the unnaturally fast-paced tissue growth. Their legs struggle to hold them. When maturing, some birds are unable to lift their bodies up off the floor to reach food or water, and may die from dehydration. Others struggle to breathe as their heavy bodies weigh them down, or they suffer organ failure within weeks of being hatched.

Cardiac events, and other adverse health outcomes resulting in early in-shed mortality is reported by the NZ poultry industry association, PIANZ, at a rate of at least 6,000 per day.

Simply put, the breeds are so unhealthy that many die prematurely, just by existing.



Zuidhof M.J., B.L. Schneider, V.L. Carney, D.R. Korver and F.E. Robinson. (2014). Growth, efficiency, and yield of commercial broilers from 1957, 1978 and 2005. *Poultry Science*. 93 (12):2970-2982



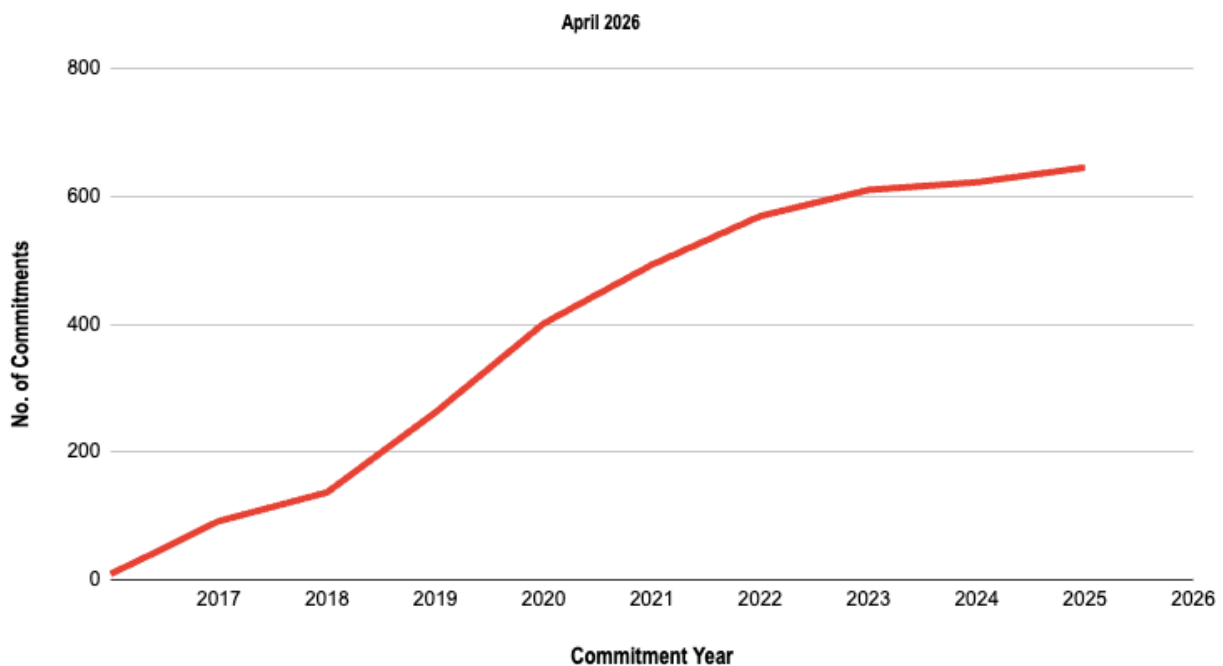
A chicken on a New Zealand farm, underneath a feeding tray. This chicken was found with collapsed legs, unable to stand up.

Growing support for the Better Chicken Commitment, both global and domestic

Change is possible and we can import the favourable progress observed in overseas markets.

Food brands who pledge their commitment to Better Chicken by signing the Aus-NZ BCC, are future proofing their ESG standards and showing their customers they really care about animal welfare by supporting better farming practices.

The number of commitments worldwide continues to rise.



Globally, there are over 600 commitments from food businesses and chicken producers to address concerns about animal welfare, sustainability, and food safety. In Australia and New Zealand, the following companies are among those that have done the same.



HELLO FRESH

Swole Foods
PREPPED FOR YOU



COLUMBUS
COFFEE

Consumers care about animal welfare. Businesses that have made the switch to the BCC do so to align themselves with what consumers expect from ESG policies.



"We can either wait, and have to join in the future, or we can be the ones that lead the way and do the right thing, because that's the right thing to do."

Domino's New Zealand General Manager Mark Toomey

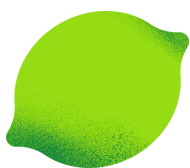


"Our taco standards are high. And so too is our commitment to high animal welfare standards....Mexico is committed to ensuring 100% of our chicken used meets or exceeds the Australia-New Zealand Better Chicken Commitment standards to do our part in advocating for a more sustainable and humane approach to food production."



"As a brand committed to the highest animal welfare standards, we are thrilled to support the Better Chicken Commitment. We understand the importance of responsible corporate practices and know that our customers expect only the best from us. Embracing the BCC standards aligns perfectly with our values."

The Coffee Club's Director Andy Lucas



"HelloFresh believes in responsible sourcing practices including the welfare of the animals in its protein sources....This commitment endeavors to bring about some of the most extensive improvements to chicken welfare at scale."



Case Study: How cage-free eggs are becoming the norm

Widespread sector change to improve animal welfare has happened before.

When Kiwis learnt about the horrors of confinement in cage-based egg farming, they demanded better.

Back in 2012, the New Zealand Government signalled battery cages would be banned in 2023, giving a decade of warning for the poultry industry to plan for change. Although this ban outlawed one specific form of confinement in cages, the legislation fell short of a significant, unilateral welfare advancement by allowing the continuation of an adapted cage called the colony cage (sometimes labelled just “colony”) to remain legal.

In 2016, two companies became the very first in New Zealand to jump on board the global cage-free trend and advocate for better in our local market.

McDonald’s and Burger King New Zealand made a public commitment to only sourcing cage-free eggs, signalling to the colony cage producers their practices, while legal, were still not palatable to the public or acceptable to their brand ESG standards.

Now eight years later, 100 of New Zealand’s food brands have committed to doing the same, including **all** mainstream supermarkets, supporting the welfare trend as it gained initial momentum.

Colony Cage



Battery Cage



With no significant domestic market left for eggs originating from colony cage production anymore, a significant portion of the egg producers transitioning away from the now-illegal battery cages were incentivised to upgrade, bypassing the unacceptable colony cages. They instead invested in cage-free farms to meet the signalled demand from supermarkets and major quick service restaurants.

This cage-free egg movement has been so successful here, and in leading markets, that the trend is now truly global, with emerging markets in Asia now becoming a centre of cage-free progress. For example, Japan's food corporation giant Jollibee made a global commitment to cage-free in 2024.

The combination of consumer awareness, public pressure and united brand standards to signal increased demands (taking into account realistic timeframes) have seen a monumental shift in the egg production methods in New Zealand towards improved hen welfare.

The cage-free egg transition is truly global, with over 100 companies committed to serving only cage-free eggs in their outlets worldwide.



Know your eggs.
A description available at Woolworths supermarkets



What is the Better Chicken Commitment

Aligning with the BCC is a powerful and practical way to show your sincere support for improved animal welfare practices, with a pragmatic time frame to plan for implementation by your business and keep up with overseas progress.

The criteria

The commitment outlines six key improvements to how chickens bred for meat are farmed. The most important is a shift to healthier breeds that grow more naturally. Other policy points include more behavioural enrichments, more space, and healthier living conditions for the chickens to be more comfortable. The standards also set out more humane slaughter practices compared to the current method of live shackle slaughter.

Making your commitment

Companies join the Better Chicken Commitment after negotiating an agreed date with one of the animal welfare groups working on the Aus-NZ BCC, and issuing a statement of support on their website.

Support can also be shared in media releases and social media. Animals Aotearoa will positively highlight food brands with BCC policy, and celebrate their commitment to genuinely improved animal welfare.

Businesses commit now, with an agreed date for future implementation, such as 2030. Once committed, you work with your suppliers and with us to implement your new policy so that all your chicken meat transitions to the new standard.



The following pages contain a comparison of the Aus-NZ BCC with the current standards in New Zealand. The latter has been written by the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee – found in the Code of Welfare (Meat Chickens) and the Code of Welfare (Commercial Slaughter).

It’s important to note there is no legal definition of free-range in New Zealand, so a comparison is made to the industry-developed Poultry Industry Association of New Zealand (PIANZ)'s free-range standards for meat chickens and the SPCA Certified Standards which can be fully indoor or allow outdoor access.

Each section also contains an explanation of why the standard is so important to the welfare of chickens. The improvements work in tandem to improve the birds’ quality of life overall. For example, healthier breeds demonstrate increased displays of natural behaviours such as perching, because they generally have increased activity levels and mobility. Therefore they have more of a need for perches or platforms, and other enrichments.

Breed:

Aus-NZ BCC	CODE OF WELFARE (MEAT CHICKENS)	PIANZ FREE-RANGE	SPCA CERTIFIED
<p>Adopt breeds that demonstrate higher welfare outcomes: either the following breeds, Hubbard Redbro (indoor use only); Hubbard Norfolk Black, JA757, JACY57, 787, 957, or 987, Rambler Ranger, Ranger Classic, and Ranger Gold, or other breeds that meet the criteria of the RSPCA (England & Wales) Broiler Breed Welfare Assessment Protocol or equivalent protocol validated by the Better Chicken Commitment committee.</p>	<p>No requirement for higher welfare breeds.</p> <p>It is worth noting that the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee issued this statement in relation to chicken breeds in 2017:</p> <p>“NAWAC has concerns that the meat chicken has been selectively bred beyond a point that is compatible with survivability... NAWAC is concerned that the rapid growth of these animals has a negative effect on the birds that are kept in adulthood - for example affecting their fertility, mortality, locomotion, and aggressiveness.”</p>	<p>No requirement for higher welfare breeds.</p>	<p>No requirement for higher welfare breeds.</p> <p>Although it isn’t a requirement, the SPCA standard includes the following statement.</p> <p>“SPCA Certified supports the use of meat chicken breeds that demonstrate improved welfare outcomes in comparison to conventional breeds. This includes the use of slower growing breeds. SPCA Certified strongly recommends that meat chicken producers switch to the use of slower growing breeds as soon as they are available in New Zealand.”</p>



BCC Approved Breed



NZ Current Breed

Why it's important:

The chickens raised commercially for meat in New Zealand live short, painful lives because they've been selectively bred to grow abnormally fast. The Cobb and Ross breeds of chickens used in New Zealand grow so big, so fast, that many suffer chronic pain and lameness. Some can't hold their bodies up and are unable to reach food or water. Others struggle to breathe or suffer organ failure within weeks of being hatched.

Having been genetically selected for unnaturally rapid breast growth, they become top-heavy, and their size makes it difficult for their comparatively underdeveloped legs and bones to hold their weight. As a result, birds can collapse, and painful lameness is common. Chickens spend the majority of their time sitting in the dirty litter (the material they walk, sit and sleep on), which can cause ammonia burns and exacerbate lameness.

The latest available scientific evidence concludes slower-growing, higher welfare breeds of chickens have been shown to have:

- Lower mortality rates. A reduced frequency of requiring euthanasia due to foot and leg problems, or dying due to metabolic conditions.
- Improved feather cover and cleanliness. This translates to a lower risk of developing contact dermatitis due to reduced litter contact and generally higher activity levels.
- Improved skeletal health.
- Lower rates of skeletal deformities. Reduced foot and leg conditions. They demonstrate improved walking ability and lower rates of both footpad dermatitis and hockburn.
- Greater use of perches and platforms. Greater outdoor range use when provided the opportunity to free range. The birds utilise outside space and spend more time outdoors.

As long as the unhealthy Cobb and Ross breeds, who often struggle to walk, continue to be used, and current stocking densities remain too high, businesses' free-range commitments are almost meaningless, because many birds will never go outside the sheds.

Stocking Density:

Aus-NZ BCC	CODE OF WELFARE (MEAT CHICKENS)	PIANZ FREE-RANGE	SPCA CERTIFIED
Implement a maximum stocking density of 30kg/m ² or less. Thinning* is discouraged and if practised must be limited to one thin per flock.	Minimum standard 10(b) stocking density in sheds must not exceed 38kg of live weight per square metre of floor space. Recommended best practice(a) Meat chickens should be stocked in sheds at less than 30 kg per square metre at all times. No mention of thinning*.	"The indoor stocking density of a shed must not exceed 34kg of weight per square metre of floor space." No mention of thinning*.	Appropriate Behavioural Interactions B17 The maximum permitted stocking density inside the shed is 34 kg/m ² and must be calculated based on the target live weight of the birds at slaughter. B18 A maximum of two cuts/thins per cycle (excluding depopulation) is allowed. B19 Where outdoor access is offered, the maximum permitted stocking density on the range is 10 birds/m ² .

* Thinning is a process where a proportion of the chickens are removed from the shed and taken for slaughter, days or weeks before all the remaining birds are removed for slaughter. It is a highly stressful process for the birds removed and those left behind.

Why it's important:

Numerous studies have linked the problems of movement and ammonia burns to stocking density. When chickens are crammed so tightly together, the litter soon becomes soiled and mobility is decreased because birds have inadequate room to move.

So many chickens with so little space per bird means that they live right on top of their own waste. This ongoing contact with the ammonia-laden litter can cause painful foot pad dermatitis (lesions on the bottom of their feet), breast blisters, and hock burns (ammonia burns through the skin). These conditions all result in extremely poor welfare.

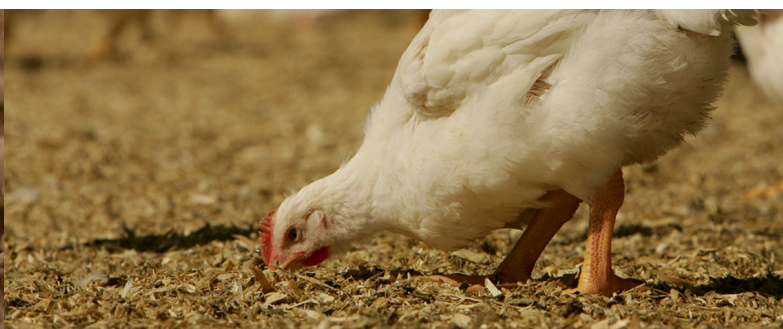
The thinning process is highly stressful for the birds.

Light:

Aus-NZ BCC	CODE OF WELFARE (MEAT CHICKENS)	PIANZ FREE-RANGE	SPCA CERTIFIED
<p>At least 50 lux of light, including natural light.</p> <p>At least six hours of darkness in each 24-hour period, with four hours of that darkness being continuous.</p>	<p>Minimum Standard 6(b) Lighting patterns must encourage activity and provide a minimum period of darkness each day to ensure adequate rest in chickens, such that: i) if only four hours of darkness is provided it must be continuous; ii) if more than four hours of darkness is provided, each dark period must be a minimum of three continuous hours.</p> <p>Recommended Best Practice: Light intensity at chicken head height should be at least 50 lux.</p>	<p>“Lighting patterns must encourage activity and provide a minimum period of darkness each day to ensure adequate rest in chickens.”</p> <p>Minimum period is not stated.</p>	<p>Appropriate Behavioural Interactions E30 A minimum average light intensity of 20 lux, measured at bird height across the shed.</p> <p>E31 Starting from the fifth day after placement, birds must be provided with a minimum of eight hours of continuous light and a minimum of six hours of darkness in each 24-hour period. Four of the hours of darkness must be continuous and must occur during normal night time.</p> <p>Recommended: An average light intensity of 50 lux across the shed is recommended for the entire production cycle.</p> <p>It is recommended that natural light openings are provided in order to allow for adequate natural light to enter the shed on overcast days.</p>

Why it's important:

Research demonstrates that low light intensity is detrimental to chicken welfare. Higher light intensities were associated with greater activity, preening and foraging. 50 lux is the lowest intensity demonstrated to increase all three behaviour patterns.



Air Quality:

Aus-NZ BCC	CODE OF WELFARE (MEAT CHICKENS)	PIANZ FREE-RANGE	SPCA CERTIFIED
<p>On air quality: the concentration of ammonia does not exceed 20 ppm and the concentration of carbon dioxide does not exceed 3000 ppm at the level of the chickens' heads, regardless of stocking density.</p>	<p>Minimum Standard 7(b) Immediate and appropriate action must be taken to reduce ammonia levels if they exceed 20 ppm at chicken head height.</p> <p>No standards for carbon dioxide.</p>	<p>No specific standards for ammonia or carbon dioxide but will be meeting the standards in the Code of Welfare.</p>	<p>Good Physical Environment E3 Ammonia levels must be maintained at or below 10 ppm at bird head height, while the chicks are being brooded.</p> <p>E39 With the exception of brooding (see standard E3) ammonia levels at bird head height must be maintained at or below 15 ppm.</p> <p>No standards for carbon dioxide.</p>

Why it's important:

The BCC standards for ammonia are already in line with Government's minimum standards.

The reduction in stocking density required under the BCC, will also reduce the concentration of ammonia in the air (from the chickens' waste) and make the air less aversive for chickens and workers.

Enrichments:

Aus-NZ BCC	CODE OF WELFARE (MEAT CHICKENS)	PIANZ FREE-RANGE	SPCA CERTIFIED
<p>At least two metres of usable perch space, and two pecking substrates, per 1,000 birds.</p>	<p>No minimum standard.</p> <p>Recommended Best Practice: Chickens should be provided with environmental enrichment to maximise the expression of normal behaviours. Such practices may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) provision of bales of hay or straw ii) perches/barriers ii) pecking objects iv) provision of peat moss or sand to promote dustbathing and other activity v) provision of trees, shrubs, or covered shelters outdoors to encourage chickens with access to the outdoors to move away from the popholes and house perimeter. 	<p>No mention of perches or pecking substrates.</p>	<p>Appropriate Behavioural Interactions B8 A minimum of three (3) linear metres of platform space must be provided for every 1,000 birds.</p> <p>B13 Enrichment items must be spread evenly throughout the shed, so that they are easily accessible to all birds. Where large enrichment items are used, e.g. cardboard boxes or straw/hay/wood shaving bales, there must be at least one enrichment item for every 1,000 birds. Where small enrichment items are used, e.g. coloured plastic chains, egg boxes/trays or pecking blocks, there must be at least one enrichment item for every 500 birds.</p>

Why it's important:

Chickens are naturally curious and enjoy interacting with a variety of objects. Providing enrichments ensures that chickens can express a variety of natural behaviours.

Chickens naturally perch above the ground, particularly when sleeping. In barren sheds, chickens are restricted to the ground and have no ability to escape the accumulated waste of all the chickens in the shed.

Litter:



BCC Approved Litter



Litter on an NZ Farm

Aus-NZ BCC	CODE OF WELFARE (MEAT CHICKENS)	PIANZ FREE-RANGE	SPCA CERTIFIED
<p>Good quality, friable litter at a minimum of 5 cm depth across the entire shed floor; managed to maintain dry, friable condition and prevent caked or wet areas.</p>	<p>Minimum Standard 9 (a) Litter must be of good quality material, friable, and with minimal risk of toxic agent contamination. (b) Meat chicken shed floor must be completely covered with litter. c) Litter must be managed to avoid levels of dustiness or dampness sufficient to cause leg, respiratory or other health problems.</p>	<p>The shed environment must provide feed, water, litter and shelter from heat, cold, pests and predators.</p>	<p>E18 Birds must have continuous access to good quality litter that is of a suitable material and particle size. Litter must be dry, absorbent, friable and free from toxic contaminants. E19 Litter must cover the entire useable indoor floor area. E20 If litter becomes irreparably wet, fouled, crusted, capped or pugged, it must be removed promptly and replaced with dry, friable litter. E21 At placement, litter depth must be a minimum of 5 cm across the entire shed and maintained at this depth until depopulation.</p>

Why it's important:

Litter encourages natural behaviours in chickens such as dustbathing and scratching.

Litter is already required, but setting a minimum depth of 5cm will help ensure adequate litter is always provided.

Cages:

Aus-NZ BCC	CODE OF WELFARE (MEAT CHICKENS)	PIANZ FREE-RANGE	SPCA CERTIFIED
<p>No cages or multi-tier systems.</p>	<p>Not currently in use.</p>		

Why it's important:

This clause is to prevent these systems from being developed and used in future.

Slaughter:

Aus-NZ BCC	CODE OF WELFARE (MEAT CHICKENS)	PIANZ FREE-RANGE	SPCA CERTIFIED
Adopt controlled atmosphere stunning using inert gas or multi-phase systems, or effective electrical stunning without live inversion.	<p>The code of welfare for slaughter allows for both waterbath stunning (explicitly banned under the BCC) and Controlled Atmosphere Stunning (allowed under the BCC).</p> <p>In practice, only waterbath stunning is currently used in New Zealand.</p>		No mention of slaughter.

Why it's important:

Waterbath stunning involves live-shackling, a system by which birds are hung upside down by their feet in metal shackles (called inversion). An electrified water bath is meant to give them a shock that renders them unconscious; however, many are not effectively stunned and will be killed while fully conscious.

Live shackling causes pain, fear and stress, which can lead to wing-flapping and struggling. In combination with breeding practices that mean that conventionally reared chickens are prone to skeletal defects, inversion is associated with injuries such as dislocations and fractures.

Halal Slaughter

As many New Zealand operations are Halal Certified, we offer a Halal version of the Aus-NZ BCC that provides a commitment to switching to a Halal approved slaughter alternative, when commercially available.

Compliance

Aus-NZ BCC	CODE OF WELFARE (MEAT CHICKENS)	PIANZ FREE-RANGE	SPCA CERTIFIED
Demonstrate compliance with the above standards via third-party auditing and annual public reporting on progress towards this commitment.	No requirement for auditing.†	Farms should regularly maintain and be audited to meet the core standards.†	<p>"It is important that all SPCA Certified members clearly demonstrate product traceability throughout their supply chains.</p> <p>SPCA Certified also uses independent audits, including unannounced audits, to maintain the integrity of the scheme and ensure that participants are meeting its standards."</p>

† While auditing is not a requirement under the Code of Welfare (Meat Chickens), all chicken farms will be having regular audits. The BCC requirements can be a 'bolt-on' to existing audit standards.

Why it's important:

Your commitment to the BCC is to help raise standards to show your business is a leader in animal welfare and provide your customers with a product that meets their expectations. Annual public reporting shows all stakeholders the progress you are making on the various BCC criteria towards 100% of your chicken supply meeting the BCC by your agreed deadline.

Timelines and reporting

Changes of this scale take time and additional resource planning, largely by the poultry industry. Caring consumers are increasingly demanding better, and in New Zealand, food brands commitments' have varying deadlines up to 2030.

Fortunately, many changes to sheds (such as installing perches and enrichments) can be done quickly, and some may already be in place. However, a roll out of the necessary new healthier genetic lines in New Zealand will take a minimum of around 24 months. This is the time it will take from the first fertilised grandparent egg import (likely from Australia due to biosecurity parameters), to establishing sufficient grandparent and parent stocks, to having hatched chicks ready to be dispatched to growers to be matured and processed.

The crucial element of this change pathway is the approved, healthier breed being imported by one of the major chicken suppliers, Tegel or Ingham's. Fortunately, they are already fully vertically integrated business models with existing relationships with approved genetics wholesalers, as well as the ability to execute biosecure fertilised egg imports into their own breeding and hatching facilities. All the necessary infrastructure and processes already exist, but more food business demand needs to be demonstrated to start this process.

We will work directly with your business to agree on a timeline that suits your needs, while balancing the considerations of inherent supply constraints at this time.

As the standards demanded by food businesses have begun to change overseas, the chicken producers in their supply chains have risen to the challenge in meeting those demands. Concurrently, additional breeds of chicken are being tested by the RSPCA UK for favourable welfare outcomes, and those found suitable are added to the list acceptable under the BCC as a way to expand accessibility to improved welfare.

We expect those who sign the BCC do so knowing that it will take some time, and commit to achieving the full commitment by an agreed date, such as 2030.

Additionally, they will be required to provide an annual public update on their progress towards the full BCC standards being met by 100% of their chicken supply.

Each food business will work with their supplier/s to create a roadmap for the steps towards full implementation of the BCC.

SPCA Certified and the BCC

SPCA NZ endorses the Australia-New Zealand Better Chicken Commitment.

SPCA NZ's certification scheme started to raise standards above the legal minimum by reducing stocking density, requiring behavioural enrichment in sheds, and perches or platforms. To allow for sleep, chickens get at least six hours of darkness daily instead of the legal minimum of four. But there is still significant improvement needed to reach the standards of the BCC.

The need for future change on breed and other improvements to meet the BCC, are signalled in SPCA's certification documentation and other articles on their website.

As the largest evidence-based animal advocacy organisation in New Zealand, their support makes it easier for food businesses to sign the BCC, as they can be more confident that SPCA Certified meat chicken standards will be transitioning to require healthier, slower-growing chicken breeds and better farming conditions.

Cage-free and hormone free

“Cage-free” and “hormone-free” labels may be used to imply higher animal welfare standards, but are only a statement of the minimum standards currently being met by all farmers. Hormones are never given to chickens and cages are not used on any farms in New Zealand for chickens bred for meat.

These marketing ploys are of zero practical value and do not represent any superior product or practices.



Sustainability and the BCC

Understandably, food brands who are supportive of animal welfare improvements are also always looking at ways to improve their sustainability.

The unnaturally rapid growth rates of meat chickens, leading to high mortality (before slaughter) is a major factor contributing to the waste caused by conventional farming. In large-scale production, losses are inevitable, but the mortality rates in conventional broiler farming are excessively high. Not only do many birds fail to reach the consumer, but farms have to overstock to account for these losses. These birds still require resources like food, water, and space, increasing the environmental footprint and suffering needlessly.

While the more naturally growing breeds require more feed and additional housing costs during their slightly longer lifespan, which has sometimes been argued to reduce sustainability, the substantially lower mortality and reduced disease incidence with these slower-growing breeds, leads to cost savings, and also a reduction in waste with a lower percentage of birds being condemned on arrival at the slaughterhouse.

The higher mortality rates associated with current faster-growing birds and intensive production systems mean millions are hatched with either the expectation of dying before ever reaching the processing plant, or being rejected once they get there.



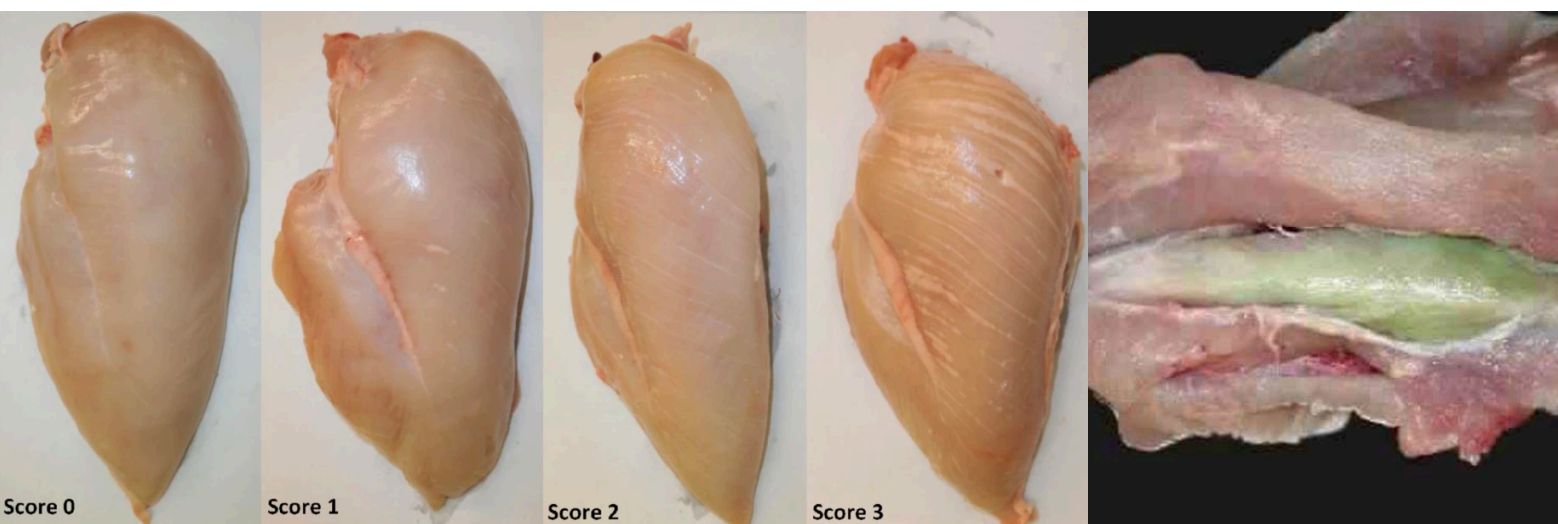
Meat quality and the BCC

Another benefit of using healthier chicken breeds is the improvements noted in the quality of the meat.

The fast growth of the Cobb and Ross breeds used currently, causes health issues for the chickens. Not only can it lead to lameness and organ failure, but it also restricts blood supply to the chickens' muscles, causing them to degenerate. This means these fast-growing birds have a higher incidence of muscular myopathies - abnormalities in the muscle cell structure.

These myopathies are very likely to be painful and can affect meat quality considerably.

The main muscular myopathies affecting chicken are white striping and wooden (or woody) breast, green muscle disease, and spaghetti breast.



Breast fillets displaying different degrees of white striping. Score 0 indicates no white striping and score 3 indicates severe white striping.¹

Green muscle disease

While most affected meat is still safe to eat, it won't have the nutritional value consumers might expect. Since white striping is actually fatty deposits, chicken breasts with the condition can have up to 224% higher fat content and 9% less protein than unaffected breasts. The collagen levels in white striped chicken breasts can also be 10% higher, which makes the protein harder to digest.

Chicken with these myopathies can also be less visually appealing to the consumer. Therefore, during the processing stage, meat with visible myopathic conditions is often downgraded for failing to meet quality standards.

The BCC helps address this issue by reducing these likely painful conditions, thereby improving quality and sustainability through a reduction in the number of birds reared.

1. Bailey, R. A., Watson, K. A., Bilgili, S. F. & Avendano, S. (2015). The genetic basis of pectoralis major myopathies in modern broiler chicken lines. *Poult. Sci.* 94, 2870–2879.

The Full Policy

By signing the Australia-New Zealand Better Chicken Commitment your business agrees to meet the following standards

We require our suppliers to meet the following requirements for 100% of the [fresh, frozen, and processed] chicken in our supply chain:

1. Implement a maximum stocking density of 30kg/m² or less. Thinning is discouraged and if practiced must be limited to one thin per flock.
2. Adopt breeds that demonstrate higher welfare outcomes: either the following breeds, Hubbard Redbro (indoor use only); Hubbard Norfolk Black, JA757, JACY57, 787, 957, or 987, Rustic Rowan, Rambler Ranger, Ranger Classic, and Ranger Gold, or other breeds that meet the criteria of the RSPCA (England & Wales) Broiler Breed Welfare Assessment Protocol or equivalent protocol validated by the Better Chicken Commitment committee.
3. Meet improved environmental standards including:
 - a. At least 50 lux of light, including natural light. At least six hours of darkness in each 24-hour period, with four hours of that darkness being continuous.
 - b. At least two metres of usable perch space, and two pecking substrates, per 1,000 birds.
 - c. On air quality: the concentration of ammonia does not exceed 20 ppm and the concentration of carbon dioxide does not exceed 3000 ppm at the level of the chickens' heads, regardless of stocking density.
 - d. Good quality, friable litter at a minimum of 5 cm depth across the entire shed floor; managed to maintain dry, friable condition and prevent caked or wet areas.
 - e. No cages or multi-tier systems.ⁱ
4. Adopt controlled atmosphere stunning using inert gas or multi-phase systems, or effective electrical stunning without live inversion.
5. Demonstrate compliance with the above standards via third-party auditing and annual public reporting on progress towards this commitment.

i. this clause is to prevent these systems being developed and used in future.

How you can support the Better Chicken Commitment

To sign the Better Chicken Commitment you can either link to the BCC commitment website on your company's website, or place the full policy text on your site.

Animals Aotearoa will announce your commitment to supporters, the public and in some cases may issue a media release. You may wish to do the same.

suppliers to order what is in excess to further help reduce waste.

AUSTRALIA-NEW ZEALAND BETTER CHICKEN COMMITMENT

Our taco standards are high. And so too is our commitment to high animal welfare standards. By 2026, Mexico is committed to ensuring 100% of our chicken used meets or exceeds the Australia-New Zealand Better Chicken Commitment standards to do our part in advocating for a more sustainable and humane approach to food production.

My Food Bag is committed to supporting improved animal welfare. We're continually looking for ways we can improve our ethical and sustainability practises, and that's why we've aligned with the Better Chicken Commitment.

The Policy: The Better Chicken Commitment is the leading set of standards for broiler welfare driving the food industry towards higher welfare practices.

Our animal welfare policies

We have worked with key stakeholders to develop our Broiler Chicken Standard. Read about the policy [here](#).

Your business next?

Communicating your commitment to better chicken

Making a commitment to truly improving chicken welfare in your supply chain is a great step and one to be proud of. Your customers will want to be informed of your higher welfare standards, and Animals Aotearoa can help you do this in the most effective way possible.

Many people support the need for better chicken living conditions, but most will not fully understand the details surrounding breeds and specific on-farm improvements.

You can communicate with your customers about the overall goals of the Better Chicken Commitment and what making that commitment means to your business.

Some sample text for your consideration

- We're proud to be part of the Australia-New Zealand Better Chicken Commitment because it means the chickens in our supply chain have lived a better life.
- We will use higher welfare chickens who meet the standards of the Better Chicken Commitment, which means they have more room to roam indoors, objects to peck at and more chance to act like a chicken.
- By signing up to the Better Chicken Commitment, we are confident that the chickens in our supply chain enjoy more light, more space to roam and places to perch – adding up to a better quality of life.

Our colleagues at Compassion in World Farming have eye-catching branding for use by businesses who have signed the BCC. This marketing toolkit is for companies to use, digitally only, to promote their journey towards the BCC. If you are interested in using the toolkit, please contact Dr Helen Farrell Helen.Farrell@ciwf.org to discuss.



Note: This logo is only to be used with the permission of Compassion in World Farming.

Frequently Asked Questions

How do I sign up to the BCC?

You draft your proposed commitment wording, including the date for implementation, and send it to Animals Aotearoa so we can ensure it contains appropriate wording to meet the requirements of the Aus-NZ BCC. We can provide example wording, if helpful. Once agreed, the commitment is announced on your website. We will also publicise your BCC commitment.

Do I need to have all my chicken supply meeting the full BCC standards before I sign the commitment?

No. Your commitment will have a future deadline, that we will discuss with you. We want the deadline to be achievable and you will work with your supplier/s to create your roadmap for transition success. The roadmap will set milestones your business works to implement each year as you continually improve conditions, in the lead up to reaching the full BCC standards by your deadline.

What is a slower-growing/slow-grow chicken breed?

A slower-growing chicken breed, sometimes called “slow-grow”, is another term used to describe breeds listed as approved under the BCC.

Since the current breeds commercially used for meat in NZ, Cobb and Ross, suffer a range of health problems as a result of their unnaturally fast growth rate, alternative breeds have been developed. They grow at a more natural rate, which means they have much better welfare outcomes, even though their age at slaughter is only one to two weeks longer.

In addition to having a better quality of life, the use of slower-growing breeds leads to less wastage from lower on-farm mortality, less birds dead on arrival at the slaughterhouse and less carcass condemnation due to low quality meat than the fast-growing breeds.



Frequently Asked Questions

I've been told by my supplier that slower-growing chicken breeds are not available in NZ. How do I proceed?

The industry spokesperson, Michael Brooks, has stated publicly that he believes the industry-owned hatcheries would bring in slower-growing breeds if they saw demand.

By progressive/forward-thinking food businesses aligning with the BCC now, it creates this demand.

We are pragmatic in setting realistic deadlines for the BCC that allow suppliers time to source BCC approved slower-growing breeds.

How does my business ensure our chicken meat comes from farms that are audited?

Chicken farms are already routinely audited to ensure they are complying with biosecurity regulations. Your supplier will be able to add the requirements of the BCC to their regular audits. If needed, we can provide your supplier with more guidance on auditing needed to comply with the BCC.

How do I reach the standards of the BCC?

Every business' deadline and roadmap to change could look a little different. Your roadmap may include things such as:

- A year-by-year gradual decrease of stocking density
- A date for achieving natural light and other shed modifications
- A timeline for your supplier to start building up stocks of healthier, slower-growing chickens so there is sufficient supply available to meet your deadline



Frequently Asked Questions

What support is there to help our company implement the BCC?

SPCA NZ facilitates a Working Group to support food businesses in working through the process of transitioning towards full implementation of the BCC in their supply chains. When you sign the BCC, you will be invited to join the Working Group. You can also apply to Compassion in World Farming to use their BCC marketing toolkit. (See page 21).

What chicken suppliers meet the BCC standards?

Suppliers will need to work towards the standards of the BCC over the coming years and, as such, no suppliers in NZ are yet to meet the full BCC requirements. At a future date, we may be able to point you in the direction of suppliers that are working towards meeting the BCC standards.

My chicken supply is SPCA Certified. Does that meet BCC standards?

No. While SPCA NZ endorses the Australia-New Zealand BCC, it does not currently require the farms they certify to meet the BCC standards. SPCA says that the chicken brands under SPCA Certified will continue to work with them on continuous, incremental welfare improvement. When food businesses sign the BCC, it provides increased impetus for chicken producers to make these essential welfare improvements.

Is there any charge to sign up for the Aus-NZ BCC with Animals Aotearoa or other animal welfare organisation?

No.

What about halal slaughter?

When chickens are slaughtered to meet halal standards, there are restrictions on the method of stunning. Halal usually requires that the chickens have the capacity to recover from the stun, so Controlled Atmosphere Stunning (gas) may not be acceptable. For this reason, the BCC provides the alternative of effective electrical stunning without live inversion.

As the latter is not yet commercially available, in the interim, a Halal Statement of Intent is available as an alternative version of the Aus-NZ BCC for businesses to sign up to.



Frequently Asked Questions

How does the Australia-New Zealand BCC differ from the European and North American versions?

Unlike the European and US versions, the Aus-NZ BCC doesn't have a specified deadline for full implementation. Each food business can set their own date, in consultation with Animals Aotearoa, as we acknowledge flexibility is needed between businesses to choose the date that is right for them.

To allow for future welfare testing of new breeds by bodies in addition to RSPCA UK, the Aus-NZ BCC allows for an equivalent testing protocol validated by the Better Chicken Commitment Committee to be used.

Both the US BCC and the Aus-NZ BCC require six-hours of darkness and friable litter across the entire shed floor; managed to maintain dry, friable condition and prevent caked or wet areas. These requirements are covered by the EU Broiler Directive, so are not directly mentioned in the European BCC.





Animals Aotearoa was founded to drive change for chickens bred for meat by encouraging food businesses to end the worst suffering of chickens. We are part of a global alliance of over 100 organisations, The Open Wing Alliance, working to improve the lives of chickens around the world.



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